



GREAT LAKES
SHIPWRECK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

June 4, 2007

House Committee on
Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Natural Resources

Via:

David Mead, Committee Clerk
Committee@house.mi.gov

Honorable Committee Members:

I would like to voice my strong support for the Great Lakes State Park bills being considered in the House Committee on Tourism, Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources (HB 4638, HB 4639, and HB 4630) and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs (SB 429, SB 430, and SB 431). Together, these bills will finally recognize the establishment of the Great Lakes State Park in 1899, provide needed change in membership and responsibilities of the state advisory committee, and create a voluntary fund for projects that will both help preserve our underwater resources as well as better market diving opportunities in Michigan.

My support for these bills is based on over 30 years of experience as a technical diver, K-12 science teacher, entrepreneur, and director of the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, a Michigan nonprofit corporation. I point to the history and success of the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Museum at Whitefish Point as one example of the great potential of the Great Lakes State Park as a tourism marketing theme. The Society was incorporated in 1978 with the vision of preserving the Whitefish Point Light Station by interpreting the maritime history of eastern Lake Superior to both diving and nondiving visitors. We now have 5 full-time and up to 30 seasonal employees at a popular museum facility that has contributed (over the past few years) about \$10 – 12 million in expenditures annually to the local / regional economy. The secondary economic impact of 70,000 average annual paying visitors is even more impressive, especially considering the limited number economic development options currently available in the rural eastern Upper Peninsula. I will look forward, therefore, to incorporating the Great Lakes State Park into our ambitious public interpretation and site development programs.

As for enhancement of underwater recreation and tourism in Michigan, we need to stop viewing our Michigan underwater preserves and other Great Lakes diving attractions as “paper parks” and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as “absentee landlords.” I would welcome more cooperation and partnership-building with the MDNR to improve stewardship of these public resources as well as to develop / promote a diversity of diving attractions that can better position Michigan as a national and international dive destination. The professional packaging of our abundant boating facilities and services, freshwater diving attractions, land-based interpretive facilities (such as the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Museum), and tourism-

savvy coastal communities should give us competitive advantages over many diving, snorkeling, and aquatic sport destinations that are frankly out-competing us for visitors.

Finally, as a former K-12 science teacher and a current museum-based educator, I know that the Great Lakes State Park will provide a clear signal to both students and adult learners about the importance of the Great Lakes to our State. It would be an excellent foundation upon which to work with state agencies in developing educational curriculum that better engages our current citizens with its most precious and unique natural and cultural resource – the *Great Lakes*.

I would be pleased to discuss our vision / experiences at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society with you in further detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tom Farnquist". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Farnquist" clearly legible.

Thomas L. Farnquist, Executive Director
GREAT LAKES SHIPWRECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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